

March 3, 2022

envtestimony@cga.ct.gov

Dear Co-Chairs Cohen and Gresko, Vice-Chairs Slap and Palm, Ranking Members Miner and Harding, and members of the Environment Committee:

Re: Testimony supporting HB 5291

On behalf of NWCTY-Torrington Trails Network located in Torrington, I write to ask you to support Raised House Bill 5291, An Act Authorizing Bonding for Bikeways, Greenways and Recreational Trails.

This important bill would increase the bond authorization for the Recreational Trails and Greenways Grants program to \$6 million. As you may be aware, in Fall, 2021, DEEP issued a request for recreational trails proposals with only \$3 million available, and received 65 applications requesting over \$22 million. The \$3 million was granted to twenty worthy projects, but another \$7 million in highly ranked proposals were unable to be funded, and we expect the ongoing need for investments in Connecticut's outdoor recreation infrastructure to continue.

NWCTY-Torrington Trails Network partnering with the City of Torrington have developed a trail system throughout the city, connecting it's neighboring towns, neighborhoods to retail centers and State Parks. This trail system is in varying stages with some sections fully completed, some routed and designed but not yet constructed, and others in the routing stage. We were excited and energized when DEEP announced the 2021 Recreational Trails Grant money available. Our City was one of the 45

applicants, and \$19 million dollars of projects that were not awarded in this

March 3, 2022-Page 2

Testimony supporting HB 5291

grant period. The need for these grant funds far exceed the grant money currently offered. Our application was for construction of a section of Sue Grossman Southerly Extension, running along the abandoned rail bed through the north end of Torrington, that would link the completed portion of this trail, starting at the Winsted border and ending on Harris Drive, to Torrington's downtown and connect to the Naugatuck River Greenway Trailhead. We remain hopeful that more funding will become available.

NWCTY-Torrington Trails Network was created by Torrington residents volunteering to create and maintain a trail system to provide no cost passive recreation to those who live and work in our community, to provide safe passage for pedestrian and bicycle traffic, to link both retail and natural resources and State Parks and Forest to our neighborhoods. The existing trails are well used, however the biggest complaint we hear is that the completed trails are too short. We see bicyclists riding along the trail safe from vehicular traffic only to have to exit the end of the trail onto the heavily trafficked routes with minimal shoulder width. On any given day you can see young children being pushed in carriages by their parents, children running, tricycling and bicycling in safety away from the roadway. You see joggers and walkers choosing a healthy pastime and lifestyle.

Studies show that recreational trails not only provide recreation, but add to the health of the community residents. They have a positive economic impact on business, shown by two recent openings of a restaurant and a small grocer/deli along a section of our trail enticing users to stop and grab a bite to eat, or simply pick up what they needed along the way. Recreational Trails also

create a sense of community, an opportunity to get out and meet people, join friends for a walk, and for families to spend time

March 3, 2022-Page 3

Testimony supporting HB 5291

together and teach their children healthy habits. This is why this bill is so important. I am providing a [link to CFPA's 2021 testimony on Connecticut's bonding priorities](#) with some facts regarding the benefits of recreational trails.

NWCTY-Torrington Trails Network strongly supports this bill, HB 5291, and appreciates our opportunity to submit testimony on this matter.

Sincerely,

Kathy Ross, Member on behalf of NWCTY-Torrington Trails Network
NW CT YMCA 259 Prospect Street, Torrington, Connecticut 06790

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